

Counseling Concerns of Gifted and Talented Adolescents:

Implications for School Counselors

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Abstract

Gifted students may seek school counselors for help with concerns regarding various aspects of their gifted experience. The purpose of this study was to determine which counseling concerns are experienced by gifted students. While underachievement and identity were not reported to be concerns encountered by 153 participants enrolled in a summer residential program, they did report concerns tied to multipotentiality, social acceptance, perfectionism and fear of failure and over half reported they asked for help on some of the reported concerns they experienced. Findings from this study have implications for school counselors working with gifted students in the academic, career and personal/social domains.

Counseling Concerns of Gifted and Talented Adolescents:
Implications for School Counselors

Recently, the school counseling profession has highlighted school counselors' involvement with their gifted students (Milsom & Peterson, 2006; Peterson, 2006). The American School Counselor Association position statement on gifted and talented students asserts that the school counselor assists in "providing technical assistance and an organized support system within the developmental comprehensive school counseling program for gifted and talented students to meet their extensive and diverse needs as well as the needs of all students" (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2003a, p. 10). This statement also outlines several responsibilities in which the school counselor can engage, including the identification of gifted students; the advocacy for counseling activities which address the academic; career and personal/social needs of the gifted through individual and group guidance; the provision of resources and materials; raising awareness of gifted issues and engaging in professional development activities in order to facilitate their continuing education of the psychology ;and development of gifted students (ASCA, 2003a). Professional school counselors who ground their work in the National Model (ASCA, 2003b) may then extrapolate their central identity question of "how are my students different as a result of the school counseling program?" to this particular population by asking "how are my gifted students different as a result of the school counseling program?"

To answer this question, school counselors must first determine who the gifted in their buildings are. Several models have offered multiple views and explanations of giftedness (Dabrowski, 1972; Gagné, 2003; Karolyi, Ramos-Ford & Gardner, 2003;

Sternberg, 2003; Tannenbaum, 2003). The Public Law 107-110 or the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, applies the gifted label to students who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas similar to that of the 1972 Marland report: intellectual, artistic, leadership, and specific academic fields. Most states base their identification practices of gifted students on the classifications of giftedness in these domains. Gifted students, 3 to 5% of the student population, are those identified by virtue of outstanding abilities, performance and achievement in the above areas. For the purposes of this article, giftedness is defined as those students demonstrating achievement in the areas of visual and performing arts and humanities.

Counseling and the Gifted Student

Blackburn and Erickson (1986) entitled the counseling concerns gifted students experienced “predictable crises,” because they were understood to be challenges that most gifted students would face at some point during their development. In 1986, challenges included developmental immaturity, underachievement, female fear of success, multipotentiality, and experiences with “non-success” or situations in which gifted students were not initially successful in attempted tasks (Blackburn & Erickson). Over time, researchers and gifted educators have included other challenges, concerns and “crises.” In their review of the gifted literature, Neihart, Reis, Robinson and Moon (2002; Robinson, 2002a) suggested these challenges can be synthesized and grouped into the following areas: gifted students’ asynchronous development when compared to non-gifted peers, gifted students’ ability to manage and regulate their emotional responses, and gifted students’ membership in groups with special needs (culturally diverse backgrounds, rural populations, GLBTQ, and gifted students with disabilities).

Gifted students also encounter concerns and challenges that their non-gifted peers experience such as moving, illness, separation, divorce and remarriages within the family, death or loss, peer conflicts, abuse and neglect, and substance abuse (Peterson, 2006); but gifted students' traits and characteristics can make these incidences harder to cope with gifted students to experience them differently than their non-gifted peers. Robinson (2002) concludes that

there is no research evidence to suggest that gifted and talented children are any less emotionally hardy than their age peers. There are, however, aspects of their life experiences due to their differences from other children and the fact that most of them demonstrate greater maturity in some domains than others that may put them at risk for specific kinds of social and emotional difficulties if their needs are not met (p. xiv-xv)

While there is no consensus as to whether or not gifted students have a greater or lesser need for counseling than their non-gifted age-mates (Colangelo, 2003; Neihart, 1999), there are two different and opposing views on the matter. On the one hand, gifted students are seen to be as well adjusted as their non-gifted peers that they need no differentiated services for their social-emotional development, or on the other, these students by their very nature of being gifted have unique interpersonal and intrapersonal needs from that of the general population (Colangelo, 2003; Gallagher, 2003; Grossberg & Cornell, 1988; Gust-Brey & Cross, 1999; Neihart & Robinson, 2001). Over the years empirical research has tried to determine the merits of each viewpoint (Neihart) with no evidence that proposes that gifted students are any less emotionally robust than their non-gifted chronological age peers (Robinson, 2002a). However, being

gifted does not guarantee immunity from problems and gifted students are just as likely as their non gifted peers to be susceptible to anxiety, depression and suicide (Gallagher, 2003). Colangelo (2003) writes that while the majority of gifted students will develop in a healthy, well-adjusted manner, there will be a “sizable minority who are psychologically at risk and need counseling that is focused on their needs” (p. 373).

While there is a recognized need for counseling services, especially for gifted adolescents (Moon, Kelly & Feldhusen, 1997; Yoo & Moon, 2006), there is a lack of empirical research exploring the counseling concerns and challenges as experienced by gifted and talented students as well as what theories, techniques and activities school counselors can employ in their service to this population (Moon, 2002; Peterson, 2006). School counselors who review the ASCA position statement discussed above may notice that part of their responsibility in providing assistance and a support system for their gifted students is to advocate for counseling activities that address the academic, careers and personal/social needs of these students (ASCA 2003a, p. 10). To provide the best possible support for gifted students, it is important for school counselors to recognize the nature of those needs.

Hence, the purpose of this study was to determine which of the counseling concerns or “predictable crises” described in the literature were reported by gifted and talented adolescents and whether they sought their school counselors for help regarding those concerns. For the purposes of this article, counseling concerns refer to the challenges of underachievement, multipotentiality, social acceptance, identity development, perfectionism, and fear of failure which are experienced by gifted students. These broad topics categorize synthesize some of the most frequently cited

concerns noted in the literature and in empirical research in gifted education with a variety of stakeholder groups including students (Yoo & Moon, 2006), parents (Moon Kelly & Feldhusen, 1997), and educators (Colangelo, 2003). Further attention in order to facilitate the school counselor's awareness of how these concerns may manifest themselves in the classroom, office, and in homes and communities.

Counseling Concerns

Underachievement

Currently, one of the greatest concerns in gifted education is the loss of gifted students who underachieve (Colangelo, 2003; Rimm, 2003). Exactly who are gifted and underachieving students is difficult to determine and definitions of underachievement vary (Colangelo, 2003), yet reports place 10 to 20% of high school drop-outs as testing in the gifted range (Davis & Rimm, 1997; Rimm, 2003; Seeley, 2003). Understanding the experience of these students should be a priority of school counselors. Among the many interrelated factors attributed to underachievement among the gifted is the lack of challenge in curricula, the slow pace of teaching and delivery, and the repetition of skills and content already mastered (Gallagher, Harradine & Coleman, 1997; Reis & McCoach, 2000; Ries & Purcell, 1993; Whitmore, 1986). When they are not challenged, gifted students experience boredom, frustration and question their purpose and commitment to academic pursuits (Rimm, 2003; Rogers, 2002). Other students, especially gifted females and gifted students from minority backgrounds, are confronted with the uncomfortable dilemma of achieving academically at the risk of losing social standing and popularity among peers who do not consider academic achievement as socially acceptable (Brown & Sternberg, 1990; Rimm, Rimm-Kauffman & Rimm, 1999).

Multipotentiality and Career Concerns

Due to their advanced abilities, gifted students are often perceived as having the necessary capabilities and skills to make appropriate decisions as to “what to do with the rest of [their] lives,” even though these students need just as much, if not more guidance and support when wrestling with these issues (Frederickson, 1986; Greene 2002). In the discussion of gifted students’ career choices, the concept of multipotentiality usually arises. While several definitions of multipotentiality have been linked to talent areas, abilities, interests, or a combination of these concepts (Achter, Lubinski & Benbow, 1996; Colangelo, 2003); traditionally these definitions refer to gifted students who have an “embarrassment of riches” (Gowan, 1980, p. 67) or who are experiencing the “overchoice syndrome” when interest, ability, motivation and opportunity are all plentiful (Rysiew et al., 1999, p. 424). For the purposes of this article, multipotentiality is defined by Greene (2006) as “the ability to do many things at very high level so competence and enjoyment” (p. 36).

Regardless of the definition used, gifted students encounter difficulties in narrowing a single career from several feasible options, in the pressure of expectations of others, and in making commitments in the face of doubts about choices made (Rysiew et al., 1999). Fear of making the “wrong” decision, not finding the “right” college, fear of disappointing others, or failure to find the “perfect” career may create procrastination of the college and career search or the choice of a “safe” college major (Greene, 2002; Greene, 2006; Kerr, 1991; Rysiew, et al., 1999). Gifted students may also encounter heavy pressure from family and educators to “fulfill” their potential and choose a career that others believe will provide them with challenge, esteem and

success, to the extent that some may sacrifice personal satisfaction in order to meet these expectations, and to gain approval or love (Greene, 2006). Concerns such as societal expectations for future contribution, prestige, family expectations, status, high earning power, and conflicting values as relayed to them by different people in their environment can be troublesome when careers and higher education are being discussed (Delisle, 1986; Silverman, 1993d).

Identity

Adolescence comes with great upheavals as well as opportunities for students to determine a sense of how their individual gifts will contribute to the future (Schultz & Delisle, 2003). One of the primary tasks of adolescence is to resolve the dilemma between identity and role confusion (Erickson, 1968). Concerns pertaining to the exploration of both gender and cultural identity arise during this period. In essence, gifted students must make sense and meaning of who they are as individuals.

A gifted adolescent's quest for identity is further complicated by conflicting societal messages regarding gender and sex roles. Differences regarding life aspirations begin to manifest between young men and women during adolescence (Delisle, 1992). Parental influences, issues relating to teachers, and grades in school become external barriers for gifted girls, while loss of belief in their abilities, social problems and isolation, concerns about future education, multipotentiality, perfectionism, and issues of achievement become internal obstacles that must be confronted (Reis, 2002). Gifted boys, on the other hand, must contend with defining their identity, transitioning to manhood with a lack of initiation rites, and receiving

conflicting messages regarding masculinity, leadership, engagement, and intimacy (Kerr & Cohn, 2001; Kerr & Foley Nicpon, 2003).

Culturally diverse students may encounter challenges to their academic and social self-concepts. Interpersonal challenges that culturally diverse gifted students face can include underachievement as impacted by academic self-concept and social self-concept, social injustices and discrimination, psychological issues, and the navigation of cultures and values (Ford, 2002; Ford & Harris, 1999; Patton & Townsend, 1997). Gifted students from culturally diverse backgrounds are continually confronted with externalized discrimination, racism, and bias inside the educational institution (Evans, 1993; Ford, 2003). With their advanced cognitive abilities and perception, these students learn about these injustices at an early age through experience and acutely feel the pain related to them (Lindstrom & VanSant, 1986). Culturally diverse gifted students in adolescence must develop a sense of racial identity as part of the developmental process. However, this identity formation is challenged by several factors. These students must also attempt to fit in among different and competing cultures and values including mainstream culture, the students' culture of origin, and the gifted culture (Patton & Townsend).

Social Acceptance

The degree to which gifted children have positive social experiences seems to vary based on age, educational environments, and their gifts (Rimm, 2002). In adolescence, the perceptions of others are important for both social and academic success. Generally, young gifted students seem to be socially accepted, but this acceptance changes upon adolescence (Rimm) in which giftedness is considered

positive when it pertains to academic benefits, but negative in terms of peer relationships (Kerr, Colangelo, & Gaeth, 1988). Students may view themselves positively but also believe that they are treated differently by their classmates (Manaster, Chan, Watt, & Weihe, 1994). Manaster et al. (1994) found that positive attitudes were displayed towards gifted students by those who knew them, but that the attitudes became more negative towards the gift as the degree of familiarity with the student decreased (Manaster et.al.).

A choice many gifted adolescents must face is which they would choose if faced with either being smart or being popular. While gifted students may not mind being known as academically oriented, they may not want to have that orientation underscored to the point where it sets them apart from their peers or in a way that would identify them as a “geek” or “nerd” (Brown & Sternberg, 1990; Cross, Coleman & Terhaar-Yonkers, 1991). Gifted students are aware that they are different, or at the very least, they assume peers perceive them as such and will treat them differently if the giftedness is made known (Coleman, 1985; Cross, 2004; Rimm, 2002).

Hence, an additional concern is the small pool of peers with whom gifted students can find affiliation and belonging. In comparison studies between gifted and non-gifted students, social acceptance is a greater concern for gifted students and gifted students have a more difficult time finding peers with equivalent talents and intelligence (Austin & Draper, 1981). Some gifted students cannot or do not choose to make the same age friends, or choose students who are older and share either abilities or interests (Schultz & Delisle, 2003). Gifted students may worry about how they will be perceived if they opt for a few significant friends.

Perfectionism and Fear of Failure

Perfectionism continues to be a highly discussed and researched topic in both gifted education and in psychology. Over time there have been different beliefs regarding perfectionism including viewing the trait as either one dimensional or multidimensional, positive or negative, or as a continuum of behaviors and feelings (Schuler, 2002). On the one hand, perfectionism has been seen as a neurotic, debilitating, unhealthy, and destructive trait; while on the other, it is seen as an adaptive behavior indicating high standards, and a striving towards excellence and personal potential (Hamachek, 1978; LoCicero & Ashby, 2000; Pacht, 1984; Parker & Adkins, 1995; Parker & Mills, 1996; Schuler, 2002).

Reviews of the empirical literature are mixed; some suggest that gifted students are more perfectionistic than their non-gifted age mates and others disagree (Parker, 2000; Schuler, 2002). Voices contributing to the literature on giftedness and perfectionism also disagree on whether or not perfectionism is healthy and on how it should be measured (Greenspon, Parker & Schuler, 2000). Eating disorders, depression, substance abuse, suicide and underachievement have been suggested as negative manifestations of perfectionism in the gifted (Keiley, 2002). However, analyses on the lives of eminent people point to the fact that perfectionism is a consistent theme described both as the dedication and desire to work, stressing the importance of high levels of aspiration, holding high personal standards, and the dissatisfaction with accomplishments (Parker & Adkins, 1995). Some authors contend that perfectionism in gifted students is adaptive and a force behind positive achievement, but their behaviors

can be misconstrued by adults or school professionals (LoCicero & Ashby, 2000; Parker & Mills, 1996).

Clark (1997) writes that at the heart of perfectionism is fear, typically the fear of failure. Some gifted students may not be able to cope with fear of failure well. Roberts and Lovett (1994) found that when gifted students were exposed to failure, they demonstrated more negative reactions and irrational beliefs about that failure than their non-gifted peers. For some students, being less than perfect is equated to not being good enough and many students will choose to shut down, withdraw, or experience panic if they do not know an answer and will avoid any situation in which failure could be an option (Silverman, 1993c).

School Counselors and Gifted Counseling Concerns

School counselors are in a unique position to deliver needed services to gifted students revolving around the counseling challenges described above. Professional school counselors working within the framework of the ASCA model have the necessary skills to advocate for gifted needs, and the potential for leadership to acquire additional services to benefit gifted youth.

However, to provide those services, there is a need for further study about how gifted students experience these counseling concerns and to whom they go for support when they encounter them. There have been few investigations into outcomes of the counseling process involving adolescents or what students encounter in their experiences in counseling (Smith-Jobski, 2003). What anecdotal evidence does exist supports the idea that gifted teens believe school counselors are available and appropriate for others, but not for them as a gifted students (Peterson, 2003). Hence, it

is unknown which counseling concerns gifted students in the visual and performing arts and humanities experience and if they seek school counselors for help coping with any or all of them.

Thus, the field of school counseling is lacking a unique voice, perhaps the most important voice of all, if it wishes to determine, via data-driven programs, how their services successfully impact gifted and talented students. Therefore, the purpose of this study, as part of a larger exploratory study investigating gifted and talented adolescents' experiences in school counseling, was to begin to fill this gap in the literature base, by providing information on what counseling concerns (underachievement, multipotentiality, identity concerns, social acceptance concerns, perfectionism and fear of failure) gifted and talented adolescents encounter according to their own opinion and experience, and how frequently they utilize their school counselors for help on these concerns.

Method

Participants

Participants were 153 gifted and talented adolescents in a southeastern state identified as gifted in visual and performing arts and humanities. This state conceptualized giftedness per the Marland (1972) report, and designated students as gifted whose abilities and potential for accomplishment in areas (intellectual aptitude, specific academic aptitude, technical and practical arts aptitude, visual and performing arts aptitude) are so outstanding that they require special programs to meet their educational needs (Stephens & Karnes, 2003). Participants were identified as gifted in this state by demonstrating outstanding abilities or potential for accomplishments

through the screening of multiple criteria including assessments of appropriate student products, performance, and/or portfolios, and additional valid and reliable measures or procedures (Stephens & Karnes, 2003). Participants were enrolled in a summer residential program specifically for aptitudes in the visual and performing arts and humanities during the summer of their sophomore or junior year of high school. Participants' entrance into the program was based on multiple criteria including an adjudicated performance or portfolio, grade point average requirements, nominations and recommendations, and essays. Age was not used as a demographic variable; however, the majority of students in the summer program were juniors in high school with the average age of 16. Participants were part of a single-stage convenience sample.

Demographics

Of the 153 participant cases analyzed, 38 males (24.8%) and 114 females (74.5%) were represented, with one participant choosing not to identify his/her sex (.7%). One hundred fifteen (75.2%) participants who completed the instrument identified themselves as White/Caucasian, 9 (5.9%) as Hispanic/Latino, 3 (2.0%) as African American, 12 (7.8%) as Asian/Pacific Islander, 2 (1.3%) as American Indian/Alaskan Native, 0 indicated they were Native Hawaiian, and 7 (4.6%) identified their race/ethnicity as "Other". Five (3.3%) did not identify their race or ethnicity. The majority of participants were identified as gifted in the southeastern state in which the program was held (86.9%), identified in the 1st to 3rd grades (55.6%), and attended public school (90.2%).

Instrument

The Gifted and Talented Adolescent's Experiences in School Counseling II (GT-ASC II) survey was a sixty-seven item questionnaire designed to measure gifted adolescents' experiences in school counseling. Survey items were developed from a thematic analysis of current gifted counseling best practices for counseling the gifted student found in the both the conceptual literature and empirical research in gifted education; specifically, the most frequently cited counseling concerns of gifted students, counselor-student relationship, activities and areas of exploration, as well as suggested resources, activities and skills. Best practices for counseling gifted students which appeared the most frequently in the literature as suggestions for all counselors in working with gifted youth (ex: discussion of the meaning of giftedness) were added as items in the form of phrases or prompts. Items asked respondents to rank the degree to which a counseling strategy, technique, or programming aspect happened to them.

Subsections in the GT-ACC II include the following: demographics, the *Counseling Relationship*, *Counseling Concerns*, *Personal and Interpersonal Skills*, *Self-knowledge and Awareness*, the *Pursuit of Excellence*, and school counseling program offerings. While it is beyond the scope of this article to provide details of each item and participant response, a sample of items is provided in Table 1.

Of interest here is the *Counseling Relationship* subsection which included six items developed by careful analysis of both conceptual gifted literature as well as empirical studies concerning what challenges and concerns gifted students might encounter during their talent development that might bring them to or be addressed by counseling. These items illustrated in Table 2, entailed four descriptors of possible

Table 1

Sample items from GTASC-II

When you last left the school counselor's office, to what extent did you feel that:	Not at all / did not apply	A bit	Mostly	Completely
Your concerns were dismissed	1	2	3	4
Your time was well spent	1	2	3	4
You were supported and encouraged	1	2	3	4
How frequently did the following topics come up when you met with your high school counselor?	Never	A bit	Frequently	Almost Always
Problem-solving skills	1	2	3	4
Setting appropriate interpersonal boundaries between myself and others	1	2	3	4
Communicating with others	1	2	3	4
How inner conflict is sometimes a part of growth	1	2	3	4
My school's definition of "gifted" and/or "talented"	1	2	3	4
What it is like to be a person with a gift or a talent	1	2	3	4

Table 2

Items Describing Counseling Concerns and Participant Responses (N=153)

Counseling Concerns	<i>n</i>	%
Underachievement Concerns		
None of these	79	51.6
Wanting to drop out of school	4	2.6
Not wanting to appear “too smart”	29	19.0
Questioning my commitment to my studies	39	25.5
Not reported	2	1.3
Multipotentiality Concerns		
None of these	6	3.9
Choosing the “right” college or career path	72	47.1
Having too many options or interests	49	32.0
Not knowing how to fit my talents with a career path or college	26	17.0
Identity Concerns		
None of these	80	52.3
Making sense of being a talented male/female	10	6.5
Making sense of being a talented person of color	3	2.0
Balancing my talent with typical concerns of a teen	59	38.6
Not reported	1	.7

Counseling Concerns	<i>n</i>	%
Social Acceptance Concerns		
<hr/>		
None of these	57	37.3
Fitting in	18	11.8
How people perceive me	57	37.3
Feeling different	17	11.1
Not reported	4	2.7
Perfectionism Concerns		
<hr/>		
None of these	16	10.5
Trying to be perfect at everything I do	45	29.4
Pressure to achieve	32	20.9
Managing expectations of self/others	60	39.2
Fear of Failure Concerns		
<hr/>		
None of these	38	24.8
Fear of failing at what I do	103	67.3
Fear of doing too well	3	2.0
Fear that more will be asked of me	6	3.9
Not reported	3	2.0

experiences pertaining to each of the six categories of developmental concerns or “predictable crises” (Blackburn & Erickson, 1986).

Items in the *Counseling Concerns* subsection were constructed in following areas: Underachievement Concerns, Multipotentiality Concerns, Identity Concerns, Social Acceptance Concerns, Perfectionism Concerns, and Fear of Failure Concerns. Each item had four choices illustrating possible ways this concern could have been experienced from which participants could chose in addition to a “none of these” choice, indicating that the participant did not experience the concern in any of the ways listed. For example, participants responding to having concerns related to underachievement could respond by indicating whether or not they had experienced wanting to drop out of school, not wanting to appear “too smart” or questioning their commitment to their studies. . Each choice was directly tied to the literature pertaining to the specific concern. Table 2 illustrates each item in this area along with participant responses.

A seventh item, “asking for help,” was intended to capture if and when participants sought their school counselors for help for any of the concerns they chose in previous items. Participants were given the following choices to indicate whether they sought help on any of the concerns listed in the item above: 1. not having any concerns, 2. never asking for help on any of their concerns, 3. asking for some help, or 4. asking for help on all of the concerns to which they reported they experienced. Table 3 illustrates this item with participant responses.

The GT-ASC II completed by the participants was the second version based on feedback from a piloting of an initial instrument at a small southeastern college. The 73 participants in the pilot were 18-22 year olds who reported themselves as having been

Table 3

Participant Responses to "Ask for help"

To what extent have you asked for help from your high school counselor on any of the issues you chose above:	<i>n</i>	%
I didn't have any of the concerns above.	5	3.3
I have never asked them for help on any of my concerns.	64	41.8
I did ask for help on some of my concerns.	80	52.3
I asked for help on all of my concerns.	4	2.6

identified gifted and talented. Of these 56 (76.7%) were female and 17 (23.3%) were male. The majority 48 (65.8%) were identified gifted in the state in which the college was located; however, several participants were identified in other states.

Procedure

Parents and guardians of 400 participating students at a southeastern residential summer program for individuals who were gifted in visual and performing arts and humanities received a consent form for their gifted adolescent to take part in the study approximately two weeks before the opening of the program. Parents completed this form and returned it via US mail or to a staff member on the opening day of the program. Upon receipt of parent permission forms, formal invitation forms were sent to those members of the sample with parental permission the first weekend of the program. Invitations described the nature of the study, outlined the procedures for

completing the instrument online, and contained a randomized digit at the upper right hand corner, which served to identify the participant responses when they were submitted online across multiple web “pages”. This digit did not serve to identify the participant in any way. No master list of random digits was kept that could link participant responses to participant identity. Participants with parent permission were sent reminders at the end of the second week of the program and again at the end of week three. Participants were able to complete the survey at any time online during the program. Paper copies of the survey were made available the last week of the program to students with parent permission who did not have either time or computer access to complete the survey on-line. Students were emailed with an additional request to complete the survey online within a one-week window if they did not already do so during the program.

The total number students enrolled for the summer 2005 program was 400. Of the four hundred parent permission forms that were sent, 178 were returned, constituting a 45% return rate. Of those, approximately 86 participants completed the instrument online, while another 71 completed the instrument on paper for a total of 157 participants. Paper responses were merged with online responses in SPSS as if they were captured electronically. Although this was seen as a viable way to aggregate the data, it did pose a limitation that is subsequently addressed. Of the 157 participants, 153 (97%) completed all sections of the GT-ASC II, with four participants not completing at least two parts of the survey. The data provided by these four participants was not used the following data analyses. The 153 participants represented 38% of the original 400 eligible students.

Results

Participants reporting of their experiences with various counseling concerns varied. The majority of respondents indicated that neither underachievement nor identity issues were of concern to them. However, participants did report experiences with multipotentiality, social acceptance, perfectionism and fear of failure (Table 2).

The majority of participants (96%) indicated that they experienced a counseling concern pertaining to multipotentiality, such as being concerned about choosing the “right” college or career path, having too many options or interests, or not knowing how to fit their talents with a career path or college. Participants responding to social acceptance concerns had various experiences. Sixty percent of participants indicated they had experienced some concern pertaining to this issue, such as how they were perceived, or fitting in and feeling different. In addition, while the concerns varied, almost all participants (90%) reported having experienced concerns tied to perfectionism including trying to be perfect, feeling pressure to achieve and managing the expectations of self and others. Seventy-three percent of participants also reported having experienced some sort of concern tied to the fear of failure, especially fear of failing at what they did.

Meetings with the School Counselor

Participants were asked to indicate how frequently they utilized their school counselors for help on the concerns described above. Of the 153 responses, 5 (3.3%) participants reported that they did not have any of the concerns above; 64 (41.8%) participants reported that they never asked for any help on any of their concerns; 80 (52.3%) participants cited that they did ask for help on some of their concerns; and, 4

(2.6%) participants reported that they asked their school counselor for help on all of the concerns they cited above. Table 3 illustrates participant responses to the “Asking for Help” item, and Table 4 by type of counseling concern reported and talent area. Talent domain areas were then recoded into two variables with 1 representing visual and performing arts areas (music, dance, theater, and visual art) and 2 representing the humanities. Table 5 illustrates how participants responded to “asking for help” by condensed talent area (visual and performing arts vs. humanities).

Participants originally chose from a series of statements describing their experiences with the counseling concerns listed (Table 2). For further analyses, these choices were recoded to 0 (participant did not report any of the statements as describing their experiences) and 1 (participants did report one of the statements as describing their experience with the counseling concern). Additionally, responses for asking for help were recorded into a dichotomous variable (0 = did not report asking for help on any of the concerns, and 1 = did report asking for help on any of the concerns). Independent T-tests were performed to determine differences in reported concerns and asking for help by talent area. No significant differences were found.

Table 4

Participant Responses to “Asking for Help” by Counseling Concern and Talent Area

	Under-achievement	Multipotentiality Career	Identity	Social Acceptance	Perfectionism	Fear of Failure
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
Music						
Ask For Help: No	6	11	7	8	10	8
Ask For Help: Yes	7	12	7	5	10	8
Theater						
Ask For Help: No	5	7	5	4	5	6
Ask For Help: Yes	5	7	4	5	7	7
Dance						
Ask For Help: No	5	7	3	6	8	7
Ask For Help: Yes	1	7	4	3	5	4

Table 4 cont.

Participant Responses to "Asking for Help" by Counseling Concern and Talent Area

	Under-achievement	Multipotentiality Career	Identity	Social Acceptance	Perfectionism	Fear of Failure
Visual Art						
Ask For Help: No	3	4	3	3	4	3
Ask For Help: Yes	2	9	3	5	9	7
Humanities						
Ask For Help: No	16	36	15	28	35	30
Ask For Help: Yes	22	47	21	35	44	32

Table 5

Participant responses to “Ask for help” by Condensed Talent Area

Talent Area	Asked for Help: No <i>n</i>	Ask for Help: Yes <i>n</i>
Visual and Performing Arts	32	35
Humanities	37	48

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore whether or not gifted students experienced the counseling concerns or “predictable crises” described in the literature and to what extent they utilized their school counselor for help on these concerns (Blackburn & Erickson, 1986). Findings indicated that the majority of participants did not have concerns regarding underachievement or identity while the majority of participants indicated that they had experienced concerns related to multipotentiality, social acceptance, perfectionism, and fear of failing. School counselors who ground their comprehensive, developmental counseling programs in the ASCA National Model, can better serve their gifted students through service delivery designed to address these concerns.

The majority of participant responses indicated that they experienced concerns related to the area of multipotentiality and career planning which were consistent with the literature (Blackburn & Erickson, 1986; Colangelo, 2003; Greene, 2002; Rysiew, Shore & Leeb, 1999; Silverman, 1993d). Forty-nine participants cited having too many

options or interests as a primary concern; however, others indicated that choosing the right college or career path or fitting their talents with that path were of concern. While 72 participants' definition of "right" was unknown, literature has suggested gifted students typically consider self-expectations and obligations, parental expectations and values, societal expectations based on future production, and considerations of success as defined by potential earnings and social status when making decisions about careers and colleges (Colangelo; Greene; Silverman). Gifted students may feel pressure to choose the appropriate career to fulfill these implicit expectations in order to not disappoint others (Greene), and make commitments in terms of future time, money and training to a path about which they may have "serious reservations" (Colangelo, 2003, p.377; Rysiew, Shore, & Leeb). These findings also underscore the need for gifted adolescents to receive appropriate career planning (Yoo & Moon, 2006).

Social acceptance has been cited in the literature frequently as a developmental challenge faced by gifted students who, due to their gifts and talents, may encounter difficulties finding like-minded peers or supportive peer groups (Silverman, 1993b; Greene, 2002). Ninety-two (60%) participants indicated that they had experienced some concern related to social acceptance such as fitting in, feeling different, or how people perceive them. These findings support previous reports that gifted students often feel different, assume others perceive them as different, experience paying the prices of social acceptance for academic success, and may chose different coping strategies to minimize the difference the gifted label or "stigma" may heighten (Brown & Steinberg, 1990; Cross, Coleman & Tehaar-Yonkers, 1991; Manaster et al., 1994; Rimm, Rimm-Kaufman & Rimm, 1999; Swiatek, 2001).

While the debate over whether or not perfectionism is more typical of gifted students and whether or not it is healthy or maladaptive, the concept permeates the literature pertaining to gifted students (Schuler, 2002). Participants' responses in this study do not suggest that their sole concern was trying to be perfect at everything they did. Some participants (60) reported being mainly concerned with managing expectations they had of themselves and others. Parental and educational expectations have been documented in the empirical studies as factors in perfectionism, self-concept and underachievement (Dixon, Lapsley, & Hanchon, 2004; Parker, 1997; Siegle & Schuler, 2000). The finding that 32 participants reported they had experienced the pressure to achieve underscores that this is a common phenomenon with gifted students (Rimm, 2003). One unknown is *how* the participants experienced this concern since the item did not distinguish whether the participants' experiences with perfectionism were negative or positive.

Over 100 participants reported that they had experienced the fear of possibly failing at what they tried to do. Hence, findings in this study indicate that gifted adolescents do, in fact, experience this concern (Blackburn & Erickson, 1986) and emphasize that the idea that the concepts of perfectionism and fear of failure are complex constructs involving several different concepts which may be difficult to measure (LoCicero & Ashby, 2000; Parker & Adkins, 1995; Schuler, 2002).

Nature of Counseling Sessions

A total of 69 participants (45%) reported never having any of the concerns reported or not going to their high school counselor for help on them, while 84 (55%) reported that they did go to their counselor for all or some of these concerns. However,

these findings raise additional questions. While the results demonstrate participants who experienced counseling concerns sought their school counselor for help, what is not known, due to limitations with the items, is for which of the concerns participants did request help from their school counselors.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study including the nature of the study, the sample of participants and the extent of their knowledge and experiences, and issues surrounding the use of an on-line survey.

First, the sample was limited in generalizability to gifted adolescents talented in the performing arts and humanities in one southeastern state. There was no comparison sample of non-gifted peers nor were students considered talented in other domains such as math and science included. The diversity of the sample, including race and gender while representative of the summer program's population at the time, was limited. In addition, there were only 153 participants. While the total pool of accessible students was approximately 400, parental consent and student voluntary assent decreased the amount of participant response.

Second, the instrument used to capture participant experiences, while based on established research, and piloted, had not been normed for use on large samples of students, gifted or non-gifted. Initial items were constructed from an analysis of frequency in the literature regarding best practices in counseling services to the gifted. Items were revised after the pilot study. Items for the pilot and subsequent versions were also reviewed by one expert in the field of gifted education with over thirty years of experience.

Third, the instrument was given in two ways. First, participants had the opportunity to complete the survey in an online format. While several studies have determined that the use of online surveys is a viable way of capturing data, this format also may be limited in several ways including response rates, social desirability, familiarity with online survey formats and time (Granello & Wheaton, 2004; Kraut, Olson, Banaji, Bruckman, Cohen, & Couper, 2004; Richman, Kiesler, Weisband & Drasgow, 1999; Schonlau, Fricker & Elliott, 2002). If computer access or time was a constraint for them, participants could also complete the survey by paper in the last week of the program or online one week subsequent to the completion of the program. Both electronic and paper-based responses were merged to facilitate data aggregation, but it is possible differences in responses to items based on which venue participants chose.

Last, what was under investigation here was the student participants' experiences with documented counseling concerns and the frequency with which they utilized their school counselors for help on those concerns. This study did not investigate what actually happened to the participants as if they were observed by a neutral third party. Participants' views of school counseling may have changed in light of their involvement with the summer program or as a response to the items in the survey itself.

Conclusions and Implications

Professional school counselors play a significant role in the lives of the gifted adolescents whom they serve. The American School Counselor Association's National Model (2003b) extends the school counselors' roles and functions to include how their daily activities make a difference to their gifted students including services provided

through the three domain areas of academic, career, and personal/social development. Findings from this study have several implications for each domain area and the way in which high school counselors provide services in each.

Academic Domain

While perfectionistic tendencies and fear of failing can extend through multiple domains, perhaps they are most likely to be demonstrated in academics. School counselors need to be aware of healthy characteristics gifted students exhibit which lead to success, achievement and internal motivation as well as those thoughts, feelings and behaviors that for some gifted students, are destructive and maladaptive (Speirs Neumeister, 2004a, 2004b; Schuler, 2000). School counselors can identify, encourage and cultivate students perfectionistic “strengths” (Schuler, 2000) as well as be the actively listen students’ frustration with situations of perceived failure. When students do not perform to their self-desired level, school counselors can teach positive coping strategies, and encourage students to see these situations as learning experiences and not as failure (Speirs Neumeister, 2004b; Silverman, 1993c). School counselors can help students discover and aim for “works in progress,” rough drafts, and help the student practice patience, successive approximations, and continued effort over time (Silverman, 1993b). These counseling practices can also be supplemented by teaching skills such as time-management, priority and goal setting, and editing (Silverman, 1993b; VanTassel-Baska, 1998a). An additional suggestion is to teach these skills in a venue where learning is not evaluated and students can explore their thoughts and feelings without fear of being assessed or appraised (Speirs Neumeister, 2004b).

Service delivery can take a variety of forms including small groups focusing on academic planning and organizational skills (Colangelo, 2003; Colangelo & Peterson, 1993), individual counseling with an emphasis on the student's specific experiences with perfectionism in academics and other settings (VanTassel-Baska, 1993), and classroom guidance activities in conjunction with classroom teachers on writing and editing. Working with parents and students both, school counselors can explore how, if at all, perfectionism is modeled, discussed or experienced in the home (Speirs Neumiester, 2004a). Partnerships are also encouraged with local tutoring or educational agencies, and counseling or clinical practitioners with expertise in stress reduction (Genshaft & Broyles, 1991), perfectionism and anxiety.

Career Domain

School counselors are already active in facilitating college searches and application and career exploration. However, findings from this study support prior literature indicating that gifted adolescents have specific concerns about how their talent fits with a future career and how they make decisions in light of their many abilities and the diverse options and choices open to them (Colangelo, 2003; Greene, 2002). A first priority for school counselors is to help gifted students understand that career planning is a life-long process and is an extension of their individual identities, encompassing not only academics, but also an interaction of values, talent, personality, social trends, and lifestyle (Greene, 2003). School counselors can facilitate this process by providing gifted students with information through multiple written and online sources, and the application of that information through the use of decision-making models, cost-benefit

analyses, self-reflection, and value and career inventories (Frederickson, 1986; Greene, 2003; Ryseiw et al., 1998; Silverman, 1993d)

Students may also need help in narrowing down their interests and desires into feasible proportions through flexible career planning and goal setting. Academic blueprints (VanTassel-Baska, 1998a) which emphasize flexibility and fluidity may help students accept that they do not have to be presently certain about what to do “for the rest of their lives,” and can help students plan their high school experience through the lens of a workable plan with multiple manageable steps. Small groups and individual counseling are logical venues for career counseling and exploration (Silverman, 1993d), but school counselors should also consider meeting with parents who are vital parts of the decision-making process (Greene, 2002), providing panels and speakers (Peterson, 2003) as well as partnerships with local business and community resources who can provide apprenticeships, internships, shadowing opportunities and mentors (Casey & Shore, 2000; Clasen & Clasen, 2003; Greene)

Personal/Social Domain

Participant responses regarding fear of failure and perfectionism may point to the need for school counselors to explore how gifted students conceptualize issues of failure, success and perfection and the role of expectations in their lives. Perceived expectations cut across multiple arenas, including student expectation about grade point average, individual assignments, future jobs, leadership roles, and social situations among others. Through role-play, small group interaction (Colangelo & Peterson, 1993; Peterson, 2003), the use of books and film (Hébert & Kent, 2000; Hébert & Speirs Neumeister, 2002), and journaling and visualization of best and worse

case scenarios (Silverman, 2003b), school counselors can help gifted students discover the impact of expectations on their personal beliefs and perceived beliefs about others, including teachers, parents and other peers.

Because participants indicated that they had experienced some concern related to social acceptance such as fitting in, feeling different or wondering how people perceive them, school counselors may wish to work with students on how they perceive the label of giftedness with regard to how their peers view them, and current social coping skills (Cross, Coleman & Tehaar-Yonkers, 2001; Peterson, 2003; Swaitek, 1995; Swaitek, 2001). Through small groups (Colangelo, 2003; Colangelo & Peterson, 1993; Peterson, 2003; Peterson, 2006), school counselors can facilitate a thorough exploration of a variety of coping skills gifted students are already employing to successfully cope with peer interactions, build on those, and help students discover new strategies if the ones currently being used are either unhelpful or negatively impacting the students' social lives. School counselors may also choose to model and teach pro-social skills such as "small talk" or through social skills training via small group or after school clubs. Individually, school counselors may wish to utilize role-plays to help students identify certain skills and to anticipate peer reaction. School counselors may also wish to pursue partnerships with clubs and activities already in place in their building that facilitate social interaction and which may already be serving gifted students such as math clubs, MENSA, or Odyssey of the Mind.

Lastly, although there were no significant differences between those participant who asked for help from their counselor based on the type of gifted student talent area and the type of counseling concerns reported, anecdotal evidence (Peterson, 2003. p.

64) suggests that many gifted students feel school counselors are there to serve students “with problems,” not necessarily themselves. School counselors should consider using data to determine if their gifted students are seeking their services, for what issue, and if they feel they are being served appropriately.

Future Research

Because of the noticeable gap in the research base on school counseling and the gifted student, more studies are needed. What is currently needed is both sound quantitative studies which document the degree to which the type of counseling concern impacts the gifted student’s decision to seek school counseling, and which orientation and techniques used by counselors of gifted students are found to be the most beneficial in meeting their needs and concerns. Qualitative studies are also greatly needed; first to capture the voice of the gifted and talented student as he or she experiences school counseling and second, to better understand how school counselors perceive and serve these students in light of the ASCA National Model.

In conclusion, findings from this study highlight the unique developmental challenges pertaining to choosing careers and colleges, social acceptance, fear of failing and perfectionism experienced by the gifted student. The professional school counselor can serve as essential person in the gifted student’s life as they cope with these challenges and consistently provide the needed services in the academic, career, and personal/social domains.

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